

## shcHELP I HAVE AN EAR WAX PROBLEM

### Did you know...?



Earwax is a build-up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust, and cerumen. Cerumen is the natural wax produced by glands in the ear. It forms a protective coating of the skin in the ear canal. Small amounts are made all the time. Flakes or crusts of earwax break off and fall out of the ear from time to time.

The quantity of earwax made varies greatly from person to person. Some people form plugs of earwax in their ear canal. This may cause a feeling of fullness and dulled hearing. It can feel uncomfortable. A hard plug of earwax can also sometimes cause 'ringing in the ear' (tinnitus) or even a mild type of dizziness (vertigo).

- Ears are designed to clean themselves. Wax in ears is normal (although excessive wax can result in hearing problems).
- Ears need wax for lubrication and protection. Ear wax is acidic and has antibacterial and antifungal properties.
- Try to keep your ears dry. Static water left in the ear canal can lead to infection.
- **Please do not use cotton buds** (or any other implement) as it only pushes the wax further into the ear. This can make it more difficult for your ear to remove the wax, and can cause impaction of wax or damage to the ear drum.

### Managing your ear wax

A doctor or nurse can look into the ear canal and confirm a plug of earwax has formed. A plug of earwax is not a serious problem, more a nuisance. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing. Earwax may also need to be removed for fitting of a hearing aid, or if a doctor or nurse needs to examine your eardrum

If you think you have ear wax you can try clearing the wax with olive oil or sodium bicarbonate drops bought from your pharmacist.

Warm the drops to room temperature before using them. (Let the bottle stand in the room for about half an hour.) Pour a few drops into the affected ear. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops. Stay like this for 2-3 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax. The earwax is softened and it often breaks up if you put drops in 2-3 times a day for 3-7 days. Do not leave cotton wool at the entrance of the ear. Apart from the risk of it getting stuck in the ear canal, it acts as a wick and soaks up the oil.

You may find it easier to instill the oil using a "dropper" bottle. The "dropper" bottle is inexpensive and can be bought from your local chemist.

### Procedure to instill ear drops



1. Lie down on your side with the affected ear uppermost.
2. Pull the ear backwards and upwards. Drop 2-3 drops of room temperature oil into the ear canal and massage just in front of the ear.
3. Stay lying down for 5 minutes and then wipe away excess oil. Do not leave cotton wool at the entrance to the ear.
4. Repeat the procedure with the opposite ear if necessary.
5. If you cannot lie down, then sometimes just massaging the area just in front of the ear (tragus) can help.

## EAR IRRIGATION

Once the wax plug is softened it may be possible to remove the plug of wax by irrigation. There are several devices on the market for self -irrigation that can be used. Ear irrigation is safe if the wax is softened for at least 7 days before.

Do not use candling. This can burn the delicate lining of the ear canal.

### Ear irrigation performed at the surgery

Due to pressure on appointments, this service is now limited. The procedure is currently not funded, and therefore our nurse's will only undertake this if self care methods like regular drops or self-irrigation have failed.

**There are some people who should not perform self -irrigation or have nurse led ear irrigation.**

Those who have :

a perforation of the ear drum,
a current ear infection, or infection within the last 6 weeks
a history of ear surgery .
grommits in the ear,
recurrent ear infection

If oiling does not remove your wax after a time and you are still having symptoms then micro suction may be offered. Micro-suction is another method for removing wax plugs. It is also used to clear the ear canal of pus and debris caused by infection or remove foreign bodies from the ear. This is performed by one of our trained GPs after *assessment of need* by a clinical member of our practice team. There are risks to both ear irrigation and micro suction .

### To help prevent a build up of wax

Please apply oil regularly. This could be a couple of drops for a couple of days every couple of weeks. **Regular** use of ear drops can prevent wax plug build ups and impaction. Be guided by you own symptoms.

**Please do not use cotton buds to clean your ears**

## Don't Ignore your Ear Problem...

If you have ear pain, ear discharge, swelling or new deafness then please book a GP/minor illness nurse assessment.

Please let us know if you have deafness in both ears or wear a hearing aid.